THE ONLY DUMPLING RECIPE YOU'LL EVER NEED

by: SARAH

529 COMMENTS

JUMP TO RECIPE

POSTED: 10/13/2013 UPDATED: 1/13/2025

We present: our family's dumpling recipe. This was the first dumpling recipe we ever published (originally posted on October 13, 2013, just 4 months after we started The Woks of Life).

And while we've shared many other Chinese dumpling recipes since, this was the OG—the blueprint and the foundation of the recipes that came after, which is why we confidently

A FAMILY OF DUMPLING MAKERS

I'm of the opinion that the Shanghainese are the Botticelli's—the Michelangelo's, Velasquez's, and Van Gogh's—of dumpling making. No one does it quite like they do. Luckily, I have a very loud, dumpling-making Shanghainese side of the family.

We've been making this dumpling recipe for a long time. A LONG time. I remember sitting on a stool in my grandmother's kitchen on 161st Street in Queens, learning to fold these…my seven-year-old fingers clumsily stumbling over everything…getting the wrappers way too wet, putting in too much filling, and crossing my fingers by the stove in a futile attempt to keep them from opening up while they cooked.

It was a time when my only cares in the world were how I was going turn my weekly $5 allowance into a new puppy, staying in Mrs. Alercio's (Gregory Elementary school's most feared second grade teacher) good books, and making sure I kept up with the latest episodes of Boy Meets World.

Nowadays, my grandmother, my mom, my sister, and I get all Joy Luck Clubby about it and sit down at the kitchen table every so often to make an enormous batch for the freezer.

We've been making some variation of this same recipe for as long as I can remember, and I've been eating them and sharing them for just as long—a quick meal on a lazy weeknight, an appetizer at one of my parents' dinner parties, a well-deserved after school snack, or a taste of home at college. One of Kaitlin's high school friends can literally devour them by the plateful.

✳ CAN'T FIND STORE-BOUGHT DUMPLING WRAPPERS?

Make your own with just flour and water, using our homemade dumpling wrapper recipe! This recipe makes enough filling for 7-8 dozen dumplings, while our wrapper recipe makes enough for 8-9 dozen. You may have extra wrappers leftover, but that's ok. We have ideas in the post for what to do with leftover wrappers! (Hint: you can make shortcut scallion pancakes with them!)

Gluten-free? Check out our gluten-free dumpling wrapper recipe, to use with any of our dumpling fillings.

CHINESE DUMPLINGS: RECIPE INSTRUCTIONS

CHOOSING A VEGETABLE FOR THE FILLING:

Okay, let's talk veg. In particular, leafy green vegetables.

When we first blogged this recipe in 2013, we used Shepherd's Purse, or jìcài (荠菜). Below, you'll see that they look kind of like a cross between dandelion greens and arugula, which we were able to purchase fresh when we lived in Beijing.

In the US, you'll only find shepherd's purse in the frozen foods section of a well-stocked Chinese grocery store. If you can get it, then grab those babies out of the freezer section and never let go. It's so much more convenient to use than the fresh stuff.

Last year, we bought some Shepherd's purse seeds and managed to grow some in the garden. They looked a little bit like weeds, but boy do they have great flavor for dumplings and

But…if you find yourself in a place where one could never hope to locate an obscure Chinese vegetable, we also encourage the use of vegetables that you don't need to tear your hair out to find.

You can go with baby bok choy (the tender little green ones. Not the giant, stringy ones you find at Stop & Shop), napa cabbage, or Chinese chives. If using fresh, all of these vegetables need to go through a blanching process, with the exception of the Chinese chives (which can just be chopped finely and then thrown in with the meat).

PREPARING THE VEGETABLES:

So first things first. Wash your veg to get them really clean. No one likes a sandy dumpling. Blanch them for 1-2 minutes (less time for a more delicate vegetable like Shepherd's Purse and slightly more time for a more robust vegetable like baby bok choy). Throw them in an ice bath or just rinse under cold water.

If using frozen *ji cai*, just defrost the veg, rinse it well under cold water, and praise the Gods for making it easy on you. (Washing fresh *ji cai* is a slow, tedious, finger-numbing task that I'm sure they would have in Tartarus if the Greeks had *ji cai*).

Drain the vegetables…

Get out the chopping block and chop the veggies VERY finely. As finely as you possibly can, or the filling will be overly stringy. Not the adjective we're looking for in this instance.

Left: chopping blanched shepherd's purse; **Right:** chopping blanched baby bok choy.

If you'd rather not hand-chop the vegetables, you can also do so in a food processor. Pulse in small batches until the vegetables are finely chopped. Do not run the food processor for too long or puree the vegetables! Stop the food processor periodically and scrape down the sides to ensure even chopping.

Here's what it should look like:

MAKING THE FILLING:

Add the vegetables to a large mixing bowl along with the meat. You can change the ratio of meat to vegetable in this dumpling recipe to however you like. We like a lot of veg with less meat, but you can replace some of the veg with more meat if you like. Your meat should also be relatively fatty. Too lean, and the poor things will be dry and lifeless.

✳ VEGETARIAN DUMPLINGS?

We suggest NOT going all vegetarian with these dumplings. Vegetarian dumplings are tricky little things. One needs a whole new plan of attack (we have a separate vegetable dumpling recipe).

Add the Shaoxing wine, oil, sesame oil, salt, soy sauce, white pepper, and water.

And…mix.

And mix.

And then mix some more.

What you're doing here is creating a very soft, smooth texture for the filling. It's really important to mix your filling until it almost looks like a paste. We find that grabbing two pairs of chopsticks in one's fist, followed by 6-8 minutes of exuberant stirring yields the best filling consistency. It may take up to 10 minutes to get your filling to the proper consistency.

Left: shepherd's purse filling; **Right:** baby bok choy filling

ASSEMBLING THE DUMPLINGS:

than I did in my cartoon-watching days. (Okay, let's be real. I still watch cartoons. I'm a major dork for anything having to do with air-bending, 90s-era Nickelodeon, and Pixar. I have the emotional maturity of a twelve-year-old, apparently).

Ahem.

Anyway, you can buy dumpling skins at the Asian grocery store. You're looking for the white round ones. If left out in the open air for too long, you may find that the edges start to dry out.

If that happens, wrap them in a damp paper towel and put them in a sealed plastic bag for a couple hours to soften back up. You can freeze any unused dumpling wrappers in an airtight sealed plastic bag for later.

To the wrapping! Get yourself a little bowl of water and dampen the edges of each wrapper. Then place a little less than a tablespoon of filling in the middle.

side.

At the end, it will look kind of like a little fan.

An adorable, tasty fan.

And that's it! (For more pictures and detailed instructions, check out our full tutorial on how to fold dumplings, using 4 techniques from beginner to advanced.)

Boil a test dumpling and taste it for salt and flavor. Perhaps you added a little more meat than our dumpling recipe called for. Perhaps your salt isn't as salty, or your soy sauce is a different brand than we use.

It's not an exact science, but the only way to figure out how to get the flavor right is to test and taste. Add a little of this or that…sesame oil, soy sauce, salt, pepper, wine, water…if you think it needs it. Once you've got the perfect filling, go through the dumpling folding steps.

Keep doing that…for the next 2 hours, or until all your filling is gone. Put on the TV, grab a dumpling buddy, and get to work. If you plan to eat them fresh, just place them on a floured surface to keep them from sticking. If you plan to freeze them for later, place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, making sure that none of the dumplings are touching.

It's an art in and of itself to try to adjust the filling amounts you put in as filling and wrapper supplies deplete–to try and use all of both. If we have more wrappers, I reduce the amount of filling I put in a bit. If we don't have enough, then I make bigger dumplings. But if you end up with leftovers, don't sweat it. You can wrap up extra dumpling wrappers for later, and make the filling into little meatballs and fry them up.

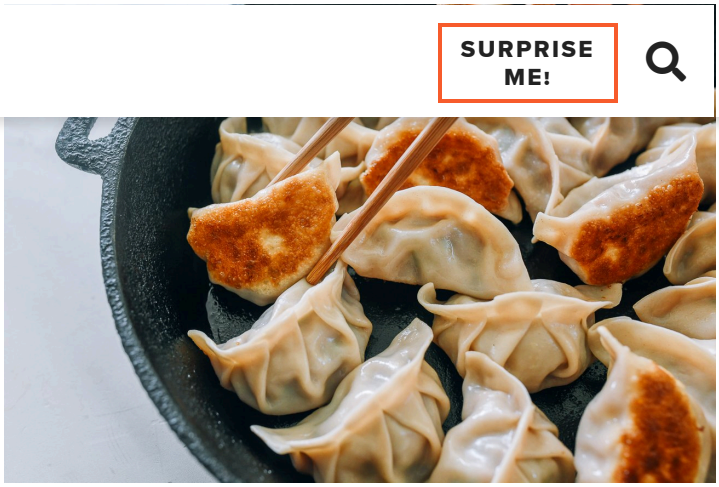
Time to taste the fruit of our labors!

COOKING DUMPLINGS:

Here's how you cook them. You have a few choices.

To pan-fry: Heat a non-stick pan or cast-iron skillet over medium high heat and add a couple tablespoons of oil. Add the dumplings in a circular formation around the pan and allow them to fry for a couple minutes. Then, pour a thin layer of water into the pan.

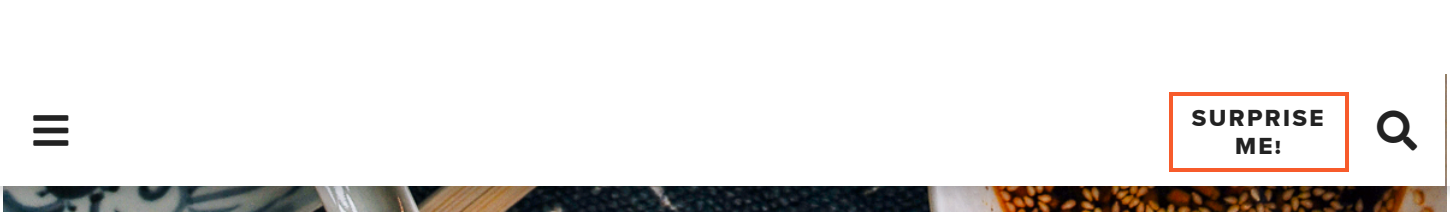
Cover and reduce the heat to medium-low. Steam until the water has evaporated. Check the dumplings. If they still look a little raw, put in some more water, cover the pan again, and steam them for a little longer. Once all the water has evaporated and they look cooked through, raise the heat to medium high and allow them to cook uncovered until the bottoms are golden brown and crisp.



To steam: line a bamboo steamer with perforated parchment paper, damp cheesecloth, or thin cabbage leaves. Place the dumplings in the steamer basket 1/2 to 1 inch apart. Bring the water to a simmer of medium-high heat. Place the covered steamer in your wok and steam for 8-10 minutes (shorter for fresh dumplings, longer for frozen).

And finally…serve the little darlings! These are little pockets of light, joy, and deliciousness.

Get a full tutorial on how to cook dumplings (steaming, boiling, or pan-frying).



P.S. We like to eat our pockets of light, joy, and deliciousness with chili sauce and Chinese black vinegar. For a full recipe and explanation on the perfect dipping sauce, see our traditional dumpling sauce recipe.

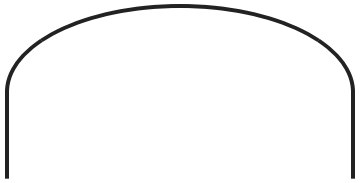
P.S.S: If you'd like to freeze them, place the dumplings so they're not touching on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Cover with tightly with plastic wrap (or clean plastic grocery bags), and put the pans in the freezer. Allow them to freeze overnight. You can then take the sheets out of the freezer, transfer the dumplings to freezer bags, and throw them back in the freezer for use later. Use within 3 months for best taste.

P.S.S.S. Phew. This was a long one. I feel I need this last P.S. to decompress. Generations of acquired knowledge in this dumpling recipe, all rolled into one tidy post, without skimping on detail. For those of you who don't like reading as many words as I've written here, here's a condensed, printable version of the recipe:

Looking for other dumpling filling ideas? Check out our full list of dumpling recipes here. If maybe this *isn't* the only dumpling recipe you think you need, also check out our recipes for specialty dumplings like our Soup Dumplings, Crystal Dumplings, and Egg Dumplings.

WATCH: SARAH SHOWS YOU THE WAY TO PERFECT, JUICY DUMPLINGS!

Learn everything you need to know from Sarah as she walks you through how to make Pork & Baby Bok Choy dumplings—from wrapper to filling, from boiling to pan frying! If you enjoy this video, remember to like and subscribe to our Youtube channel for more!



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THE ONLY DUMPLING RECIPE YOU'LL EVER NEED

We've been making this dumpling recipe for a long time. A LONG time. I remember sitting on a stool in my grandmother's kitchen making this dumpling recipe.

by: *sarah*

SERVES: 16 *tap or hover # to scale*

PREP: *2 hours* **COOK:** *15 minutes* **TOTAL:** *2 hours 15 minutes*

PRINT

RATE

INGREDIENTS

- [ ] 3 lbs green leafy vegetable *(like shepherd's purse, baby bok choy, or napa cabbage)*
- [ ] 1 ½ pounds ground pork *(can substitute ground chicken or beef, as long as they aren't too lean)*
- [ ] 2/3 cup shaoxing wine *(or dry cooking sherry)*
- [ ] ½ cup neutral oil *(such as canola, vegetable, or avocado oil)*
- [ ] 3 tablespoons sesame oil
- [ ] 1 tablespoon salt
- [ ] 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- [ ] ¼ teaspoon white pepper
- [ ] 2/3 cup water *(plus more for assembly)*
- [ ] 3 packages dumpling wrappers

US CUSTOMARY | METRIC

INSTRUCTIONS

vegetable like napa cabbage or baby bok choy.) Cool by transferring to an ice bath or a colander under cold running water. Ring out all the water from the vegetables and chop very finely.

2. In a large bowl, stir together the vegetables, meat, wine, oil, sesame oil, salt, soy sauce, white pepper, and water. Mix vigorously for 6-8 minutes (or even up to 10 minutes), until very well-combined and paste-like.
3. To wrap the dumplings, dampen the edges of each circular wrapper with some water. Put a little less than a tablespoon of filling in the middle. Fold the circle in half and pinch the wrapper together at the top. Then make two folds on each side, until the dumpling looks like a fan. Make sure it's completely sealed.
4. Boil a couple dumplings to taste test them, and adjust seasoning if needed. Finish assembling the dumplings, placing them on a parchment-lined baking sheet so they are not touching.
5. **To freeze:** wrap the baking sheets tightly with plastic wrap and put the pans in the freezer. Freeze overnight, then transfer the dumplings to freezer bags, and transfer back to the freezer for later.
6. **To boil:** bring a large pot of water to a boil, drop the dumplings in, and bring back up to a boil. Simmer for 6-8 minutes (shorter for fresh dumplings, longer for frozen).
7. **To pan-fry:** heat 2 tablespoons oil in a non-stick pan over medium-high heat. Place the dumplings in the pan and allow to fry for 2 minutes. Pour a thin layer of water into the pan, cover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Allow dumplings to steam until the water has evaporated. Remove the cover, increase heat to medium-high and allow to fry for a few more minutes, until the bottoms of the dumplings are golden brown and crisp.
8. **To steam:** place dumplings in a steamer basket lined with damp cheesecloth, perforated parchment paper, or thin cabbage leaves. Bring water in a steamer to a simmer, and steam over medium-high heat for 8-10 minutes (shorter for fresh dumplings, longer for frozen).

TIPS & NOTES:

sealed plastic bag for a couple hours to soften back up.

Freeze any unused dumpling wrappers in an airtight sealed plastic bag for later, or try this recipe.

Serve with our dumpling sauce, chili oil, Chinese black vinegar, or your favorite dipping sauce!

Recipe makes about 7-8 dozen.

NUTRITION FACTS

Calories: *387kcal (19%)* ***Carbohydrates:*** *35g (12%)* ***Protein:*** *14g (28%)* ***Fat:*** *19g (29%)* ***Saturated Fat:*** *4g (20%)* ***Cholesterol:*** *36mg (12%)* ***Sodium:*** *1026mg (43%)* ***Potassium:*** *178mg (5%)* ***Fiber:*** *2g (8%)* ***Sugar:*** *1g (1%)* ***Vitamin A:*** *3795IU (76%)* ***Vitamin C:*** *38.6mg (47%)* ***Calcium:*** *127mg (13%)* ***Iron:*** *3mg (17%)*

nutritional info disclaimer

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ABOUT SARAH

Sarah Leung is the eldest daughter in The Woks of Life family, working alongside younger sister Kaitlin and parents Bill and Judy. You could say this multigenerational recipe blog was born out of two things: 1) her realization in college that she had no idea how to make her mom's Braised Pork Belly and 2) that she couldn't find a job after graduation. With the rest of the family on board, she laid the groundwork for the blog in

Life photographer, Sarah loves creating accessible recipes that chase down familiar nostalgic flavors while adapting to the needs of modern home cooks. Alongside her family, Sarah has become a New York Times Bestselling author with their cookbook, The Woks of Life: Recipes to Know and Love from a Chinese American Family, as well as a James Beard Award nominee and IACP Award finalist.

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529 COMMENTS

NEWEST

JUDY
Posted: 4 months ago

Can I use green cabbage? Napa cabbage is impossible to find in my small town.

SARAH

AUTHOR

Reply to Judy

Posted: 4 months ago

Hi Judy, spinach would probably be a better substitute. Alternatively you can try our chicken zucchini dumplings. Just as delicious, but with an easy to find ingredient: https://thewoksoflife.com/chicken-zucchini-dumplings/. Or our Pork & Celery Dumplings: https://thewoksoflife.com/pork-and-celery-dumplings/

0

REPLY

ANTOINETTE

Posted: 4 months ago

★★★★★

Delicious. I am making a second batch so I have plenty in my freezer. I had fun making them and don't plan on buying them from the store anymore.

0

REPLY

SARAH

AUTHOR

Reply to Antoinette

Posted: 4 months ago

Amazing! So glad you enjoyed them Antoinette!

0

REPLY

ANNA

Posted: 4 months ago

salt in half and still very salty. I think the soy sauce is too much.

0

REPLY

SARAH

AUTHOR

Reply to Anna

Posted: 4 months ago

Hmmm we don't find this recipe to be salty! Did you weigh the vegetables? But you can certainly adjust it!

0

REPLY

WYN

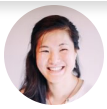
Posted: 4 months ago

★★★★★

I grew up on my mum's pork and preserved mustard green dumplings and love all varieties (as you can tell from my email) These were so juicy and delicious even though I forgot to add the water and put in a third of the neutral oil. One "mistake" in the recipe – there is no way this serves 16 – we made 3 packets worth (90) tonight and ate every last one between the four of us! Happy new year!

1

REPLY



AUTHOR

Reply to Wyn

Posted: 4 months ago

Happy new year!

0

REPLY

KATHERINE

Posted: 4 months ago

Can the filling be made ahead two days in advance for a party? I don't think it'll spoil, but will the filling leak more water or get significantly worse in quality over that time?

0

REPLY

SARAH

AUTHOR

Reply to Katherine

Posted: 4 months ago

Two days should be okay, Katherine. Just give it a good mix before assembling!

0

REPLY

ANTOINETTE

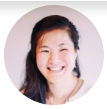
Posted: 4 months ago

★★★★★

These turned out great. Your instructions were easy to follow.
I will be making these again to store in my freezer.

1

REPLY



AUTHOR

Reply to Antoinette

Posted: 4 months ago

Thanks for trying the recipe and leaving us a review, Antoinette! :)

0

REPLY

CAROLYN
Posted: 4 months ago

★★★★★

I am on a salt restriction diet. Are there any recipes with less sodium?

1

REPLY

HAZEL
Posted: 5 months ago

Would it be ok to steam? Instead of pan frying?

1

REPLY

LMCB
Posted: 5 months ago

★★★☆☆

A little bland. We added a half teaspoon of ginger grated, but could've used much more and garlic. We used Napa cabbage, which was very mild, so that might have been part of the problem. Otherwise very straightforward and easy.

1

REPLY

SARAH
AUTHOR

Thanks for sharing! Definitely make sure you're cooking a test dumpling before you make the whole batch, so you can adjust seasoning to your liking.

3

REPLY

CHARLES
Posted: 6 months ago

Thank you for this recipe! I can't wait to make this, this weekend!

1

REPLY

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bill's pick

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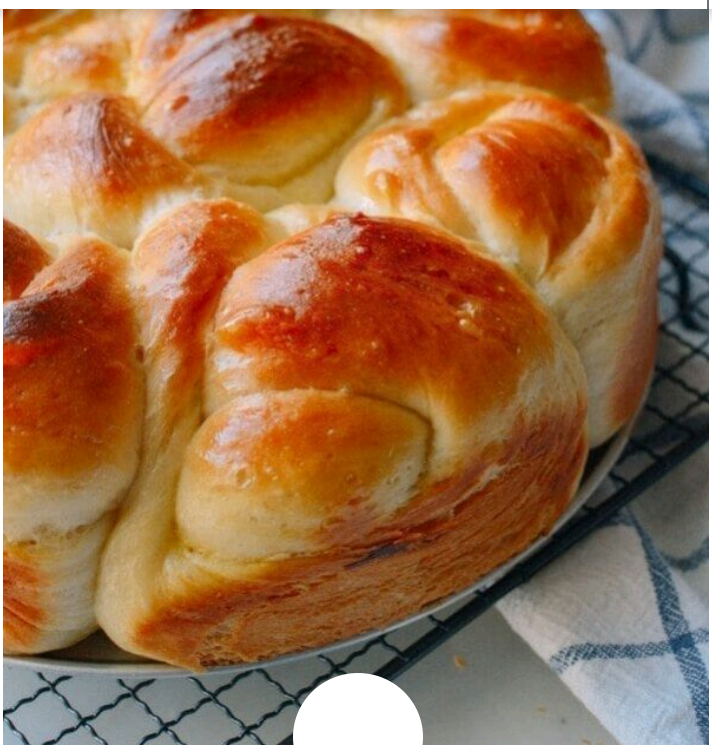

judy's pick

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"I am proud to say that your genealogy has been the sole tutorial for my Asian-inspired culinary adventures for years; probably since you began. Time and again, my worldwide web pursuits for solid recipes that I know my family will eat has landed me back here."

BETH, COMMUNITY MEMBER SINCE 2013

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